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9 February 1967
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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT : Status of North Vietnam Infiltration Into South Vietnam

REFERENCE : USIB-D-24.5/3, 3 February 1967

1. At its meeting on 9 February 1967 the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) discussed the interagency group study on the subject attached to the reference, including consideration of a number of proposed changes.

2. The Board then concurred with the Chairman's proposal that the paper be referred to an ad hoc group representing interested agencies under DIA chairmanship to prepare a revised version based upon the Board's discussion, for circulation by 1700 on this date as an agreed intelligence community position.

3. The attached revised paper on the subject, prepared immediately following the USIB meeting by an interagency ad hoc group, is accordingly circulated herewith for information as an agreed intelligence community position.

Executive Secretary

Attachment

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9 February 1967

THE STATUS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE INFILTRATION INTO SOUTH VIETNAM

Conclusions

1. During 1966, the infiltration of almost 78,000 men into South Vietnam has been reported.* US military authorities, as of 25 January 1967, had confirmed the infiltration of about 39,500 of these and accepted as "probable" the infiltration of another 10,000. The remaining 28,000 are listed in the "possible" category. At least 21,000-24,000 of the personnel whose infiltration has been confirmed came in as members of 12 North Vietnamese infantry regiments whose arrival in South Vietnam during 1966 has also been confirmed by MACV. Nine of these regiments came in via the Laos corridor route and were assigned to portions of the country from the southern I Corps area southward through III Corps. The other three regiments and elements of a fourth regiment came directly across the DMZ into the northern part of I Corps.

2. All 12 of these infantry regiments arrived in South Vietnam in or prior to the summer of 1966. Since then, although there have been a few reports of the arrival of additional infantry regiments during the

* See Annex B~~TOP SECRET~~

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latter half of the year, none has as yet been confirmed. Although it is possible that the arrival of one or two additional infantry regiments since summer may eventually be confirmed, the indices point to a sharp drop in the infiltration of such units in the latter half of 1966. There have been limited SIGINT and collateral indications of regimental infantry infiltration in contrast to the large number of such indications which were evident during the heavy influx of these units to South Vietnam in the first half of 1966.

3. In addition to the infiltration of infantry regiments which took place during the first half of the year, there was a steady influx of North Vietnamese support elements and other units, some intended as replacements and fillers for Communist units already in place in the South. During the latter half of 1966, the infiltration statistics, as based on the evidence now available, appear to suggest a drop off in such infiltration. However, we think this is probably not the case. A large number of these personnel are now carried under the "possible" category in current infiltration statistics. Available evidence indicates, however, that the entry of many of them, at least through October, may eventually be confirmed. There is insufficient evidence on the rate of infiltration of support and other type personnel during the last two months of 1966 to

conclude whether or not there has been a significant change in the rate of such infiltration.

4. The US interdiction program undoubtedly has had an impact on North Vietnam's infiltration and logistic support effort. The extent of this impact is extremely difficult to assess. We believe that the most valid explanation, however, for the drop in the infiltration of regimental-size infantry units during the latter half of 1966 may be that Hanoi had achieved most of the basic force structure planned for South Vietnam in 1966. It continued, however, to send in support and filler personnel to flesh out this basic force structure and provide replacements.

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I. Evidence Concerning Regimental Infiltration

1. Since December 1964, when the first regular North Vietnamese Army Regiment arrived in South Vietnam via the Laos corridor, a total of about 21 North Vietnamese infantry regiments moved into South Vietnam. (See Annex A.) Seventeen of these regiments moved via the Laos corridor and three regiments and elements of a fourth regiment entered South Vietnam directly across the DMZ. All of these regiments arrived in South Vietnam in or prior to the summer of 1966. Since then, there has been no confirmation of the arrival of additional infantry regiments. The accepted total number of regiments introduced during 1966 (12 infantry regiments) slightly exceeds the number which arrived in 1965, and it is possible that more will be accepted.

2. The infiltration of the above units as well as the high rate of total infiltration of North Vietnamese personnel as replacements and in support units during 1966 (see Section II) have tended to obscure what may be a significant, although possibly temporary, change in the pattern of infiltration of North Vietnamese units. It appears that the infiltration of North Vietnamese regimental size infantry units via the traditional infiltration route through Laos dropped off sharply after the summer of 1966. The last infantry regiment to arrive via the Laos

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corridor which has been accepted in the MACV order of battle is the 52d Regiment; it departed North Vietnam in April and entered South Vietnam in July 1966. Since then, however, there has been little evidence (from prisoners, documents or other sources) which would indicate the arrival of more North Vietnamese infantry regiments except across the DMZ. The movement of the three regiments of the 324B Division directly across the DMZ within a short period of time marked a significant departure in the pattern of infiltration both in the context of the route used and the size of force involved.

3. It is of course true that the confirmation of arrival of units has in many cases been considerably delayed. The 32d Regiment, for example, was not firmly identified until 10 months after its arrival, and a delay of three to five months in firm identification of a unit is about normal, particularly in cases when the unit has not been engaged in a battle which has resulted in the capture of prisoners and documents. The evidence obtained only recently that the 165th Regiment was in South Vietnam for some seven months before being firmly identified has again shown the pitfalls of relying on currently available data to assess the level of infiltration at any time.

4. There are, however, other indices which support the likelihood of a sharp drop in regimental infiltration through Laos in the last half

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of 1966. During late 1965 and early 1966, when the bulk of North Vietnamese regiments moved to South Vietnam, there were substantial indications from a variety of sources that a large-scale augmentation of the North Vietnamese Army and infiltration of units into South Vietnam was under way, even though it was not until some time later that the scale of the movement and identification of the units could be established. These indications included: some evidence from North Vietnam on expansion of the armed forces and statements which implied that NVA units were to be committed to the South; [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] preliminary reports from prisoners, documents and other sources which indicated the arrival of NVA units in South Vietnam; a large-scale expansion of the military [REDACTED] structure in South Vietnam; and documentary evidence of the formation or planned formation of NVA divisions in the South. In many (although not all) instances, there were indications of the presence of NVA regiments in the South before they met the criteria of order of battle acceptance. Similarly, the southward movement of the 324B Division and of the "mid-65" division and indications that elements of the 341st Division would also become involved in operations in the DMZ area

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were obtained on a reasonably current basis during the summer and early fall of 1966.

5. In contrast there were only a few indications during the last six months of 1966 which would suggest continuation of any significant movement of NVA regiments through Laos. There is, moreover, only limited evidence on the infiltration of regimental forces in the DMZ area for the period September-December 1966. During 4-6 October, some units were seen infiltrating the Western/DMZ/Laos border. While a regimental size force has not been engaged, there have been repeated sightings and contacts with platoon to battalion size units. This indicates that the area was in use, although the size and type of force is unknown and no units have been accepted in the OB. The last unit which can be identified

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as a likely candidate for infiltration is the "mid-65" division which was deploying southward in August and which, if committed to South Vietnam, will probably move through the DMZ.

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Captured

documents, including some excellent documentary information from

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Communist Military Region V have provided no evidence that additional divisional structures are present or in process of formation in that area and have generally confirmed present OB holdings.

II. Infiltration of Personnel Other Than in Regimental Units

6. Except for the movements through the DMZ into Quang Tri Province, we believe that cumulative evidence strongly suggests that the North Vietnamese have concentrated more on fleshing out their basic force structure in South Vietnam (divisions and infantry regiments) over the past six months than in adding additional major infantry units. This does not mean, of course, that all infiltration via the Laos corridor has ceased since the movement of replacement groups and various types of support units has almost certainly continued via this route. Several such units have been accepted in OB, including at least one artillery regiment (the 84A Regiment) which arrived in about August. The function of units of this type is to provide support to existing divisional and regimental infantry units.

7. In terms of 1966 infiltration statistics MACV has accepted (confirmed and probable) about 50,000, and an additional 28,000 are carried in a "possible" category (see Annex B). Approximately 21,000-24,000 of the accepted infiltrators entered South Vietnam in

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infantry regiments. The remainder entered as replacements or in support/specialized units. If we consider only the infiltrators in the "accepted" category, the average monthly infiltration rate during 1966 is about 5,400.* When computed on a quarterly basis for the first three quarters of the year the average monthly rate for each quarter would be 8,000, 6,000 and 2,600. If both infiltration categories--accepted and possible-- are considered for this nine-month period, the average monthly infiltration rate is 7,900. Monthly averages for both categories when computed on a quarterly basis are 10,600, 7,500, and 5,600, respectively.

8. Although a large number of the support units and other personnel are still carried under the "possible" category in the infiltration records, the present evidence indicates that the entry of many of them--especially for the months from July through October--will eventually be confirmed. Therefore, the confirmed rate of infiltration of other than regimental units, at least through October, may eventually come into line with the confirmed rate for this type of personnel for the first half of the year. There are tentative indications, based on an incomplete data, that the infiltration of support units and other personnel, via both the DMZ and the Laos corridor route may have dropped off during November and

*Based on first nine months of 1966.

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December. Reports have been received so far on the possible arrival of less than 1,200 infiltrators. However, there are [] collateral reports as yet unconfirmed of a possible step-up of infiltration in late December and in January 1967. We believe it is too early to conclude whether or not there has been a significant change in the rate of infiltration since October.

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9. The US interdiction program undoubtedly has had an impact on North Vietnam's infiltration and logistic support effort. The extent of this impact is extremely difficult to assess. The most valid explanation, however, for the apparent change in the infiltration pattern may be that the North Vietnamese, as of the summer of 1966, had achieved most of the basic force structure they had planned for South Vietnam in 1966. By July 1966, Hanoi had a force of seven divisions in being with at least 21 infantry regiments. There was fairly good evidence that NVA and VC forces had planned and hoped to implement a series of fairly large-scale military operations during the latter half of 1966. Such an action may have been planned, for example, in the northern provinces of South Vietnam by a multi-divisional force coming across the DMZ. Hanoi may have hoped such an offensive would achieve a significant victory in this area or, at the least, divert sufficient US forces to northern South

Vietnam to permit Communist units elsewhere in South Vietnam to launch major offensive operations.

10. Pending the outcome of the operation, North Vietnam may have decided to cut back the infiltration of major units into areas farther south. While the ultimate objective of the DMZ operation is not entirely clear, the documents captured from the 324B Division and statements of its prisoners suggested, at least initially, that the NVA did hope to "liberate" Quang Tri Province and perhaps Thua Thien Province as well and establish a stronghold in the northern area of South Vietnam which would facilitate further infiltration and offensive operations. If so, the operation, like other large-scale operations planned by North Vietnamese forces in 1966, largely failed to achieve its objectives (although it has tied down a considerable US force in the area) and resulted in at least a temporary withdrawal of major elements of the invading force into the DMZ or North Vietnam.

11. Elsewhere in South Vietnam, Communist attempts to launch large-scale actions were often thwarted when NVA/VC units were simply unable to react rapidly or to change their tactical plans in the face of US/FWMAF spoiling operations. In addition, Communist units suffered from an inferiority in firepower, mobility and logistics when

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opposed by US forces.

12. One additional possible explanation for the apparent decline in regimental infiltration is that the Communists have decided to give less emphasis to large-scale operations and more to small unit actions and guerrilla-type warfare. There is some recent evidence to support this, and the general lack of success which the Communists had in launching large-scale operations over the past year would suggest that they have somewhat belatedly made a more realistic assessment of their capabilities and have recognized that more emphasis on small-scale operations would be in their interest. If in fact a decision has been reached to give primary emphasis to small-scale operations, it might be that North Vietnam would see little value in a further substantial buildup in the number of regiments or divisions in South Vietnam. In this case, infiltration over the next several months at least would probably be comprised largely of replacement groups, small, specialized units, and the total number of infiltrators per month will probably be oriented toward offsetting attrition rather than toward substantially increasing the number of major units as in late 1965 and early 1966.

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ANNEX A

NORTH VIETNAMESE INFANTRY REGIMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>Infiltration Route</u>	<u>Dates of Infiltration</u>	<u>Date Accepted by MACV</u>	<u>Location & Subordination in South Vietnam</u>
95th	Laos	Dep NVN Oct 64 Arr SVN Dec 64	1 Oct 65	Phu Yen Province 5th Div (NVA)
32d	Laos	Dep NVN Sep- Oct 64 Arr SVN Jan 65	1 Nov 65	Pleiku Province 1st Div
101st	Laos	Dep NVN Dec 64 Arr SVN Feb 65	3 Jul 65	Tay Ninh Province 9th Div (VC)
18th	Laos	Dep NVN Feb 65 Arr SVN Apr 65	1 Oct 65	Binh Dinh Province 3d Div
22d	Laos	Dep NVN Jul 65 Arr SVN Sep 65	17 Feb 66	Binh Dinh/Quang Ngai Provinces 3d Div
33d (101B)	Laos	Dep NVN Jul 65 Arr SVN Oct 65	14 Nov 65	Pleiku Province 1st Div
66th	Laos	Dep NVN Jul- Aug 65 Arr SVN Oct 65	21 Nov 65	Pleiku Province 1st Div
6th	Activated in Quang Tri Province Oct 65		10 Apr 66	Quang Tri Province Northern Sub-Region of Military Region V
21st	Laos	Dep NVN Aug 65 Arr SVN Dec 65	8 Mar 66	Quang Tin Province 2d Div
18B	Laos	Dep NVN Dec 65 Arr SVN Feb 66	8 May 66	Phu Yen Province 5th Div (NVA)
95B	Laos	Dep NVN Dec 65 Arr SVN Mar 66	1 Apr 66	Kontum/Pleiku Provinces 10th Div
101C	Laos	Dep NVN Jan 66 Arr SVN Mar 66	28 Nov 66	Pleiku Province 10th Div
141st	Laos	Dep NVN Jan 66 Arr SVN Mar 66	17 May 66	Phuoc Long Province 7th Div

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<u>Regiment</u>	<u>Infiltration Route</u>	<u>Dates of Infiltration</u>	<u>Date Accepted by MACV</u>	<u>Location & Subordination in South Vietnam</u>
24th	Laos	Dep NVN Jan 66 Arr SVN Mar 66	31 May 66	Kontum Province Subord unknown
88th	Laos	Dep NVN Jan 66 Arr SVN Mar 66	15 Jun 66	Kontum Province 10th Div
3d	Laos	Dep NVN Feb 66 Arr SVN Apr 66	23 Jul 66	Quang Tin Province 2d Div
165th	Laos	Dep NVN Mar 66 Arr SVN Jun- Jul 66	23 Jan 67	Phuoc Long Province 7th Div
52d*	Laos	Dep NVN Apr 66 Arr SVN Jul 66	23 Jan 67	Phuoc Long Province 7th Div
812th	DMZ	Dep NVN May 66 Arr SVN Jun 66	12 Jul 66	DMZ/Quang Tri Province 324B Div
90th	DMZ	Dep NVN May 66 Arr SVN Jun 66	22 Jul 66	DMZ/Quang Tri Province 324B Div
803d	DMZ	Dep NVN May 66 Arr SVN Jun 66	22 Jul 66	DMZ/Quang Tri Province 324B Div
31st (2 Bns)	DMZ	Dep NVN Aug 66 Arr SVN Aug 66	30 Nov 66	DMZ/Quang Tri Province 341st Div

*Arrived in Peiku in July and moved to Phuoc Long in September.

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ANNEX B

INFILTRATION TOTALS

(Reported as of 25 January 1967)

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>ACCEPTED</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>POSSIBLE</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
	Confirmed	Probable			(Accepted & Possible)
JAN	3,032	1,785	4,817	2,070	6,887
FEB	6,600	1,768	8,368	2,410	10,778
MAR	9,537	1,324	10,861	3,900	14,761
APR	90	791	881	20	901
MAY	2,400	2,890	5,290	3,465	8,755
JUN	10,460	600	11,060	1,795	12,855
JUL	4,238	120	4,358	5,506	9,864
AUG	1,550	400	1,950	3,300	5,250
SEP	1,400	NA	1,400	300	1,700
OCT	115	500	615	4,200	4,815
NOV	NA *	NA	NA	630	630
DEC	NA	NA	NA	530	530
TOTAL	39,422	10,178	49,600	28,126	77,726

ACCEPTED - ACCEPTED CONFIRMED: A confirmed unit/group is one which is determined to exist on the basis of information provided by a minimum of two captives, returnees or captured documents (any combination).

ACCEPTED PROBABLE: A probable infiltration unit/group is one believed to exist on the basis of information which can be evaluated as probably true provided by one captive, returnee or captured document.

POSSIBLE - A possible infiltration group/unit is one which is believed to exist on the basis of information which can be evaluated as possibly true, even though no captive, returnee or document is available to verify the report or reports.

* NA - not available.

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